

MIDSUMMER BIRDS IN THE CATSKILL MOUNTAINS.

BY STANLEY COBB, M.D.

ONE hundred miles north of New York City the Catskill Mountains rise from the west shore of the Hudson River making a circular uplift some 100 square miles in area. Near the little hamlet of Hardenburg on the Beaverkill stream I have spent the first part of July for several years. The altitude in this locality is from 2000 feet in the valleys to 3,800 feet at the summits of the round topped, but steep mountains which are covered with a dense second growth of hardwood succeeding the hemlock forest of sixty years ago. Remnants of these magnificent hemlocks can still be seen all through the woods, for when they were cut their bark was stripped off for the tanneries and the great trunks still lie rotting and moss covered in the damp shade, while the stumps — many of them three or four feet across — stand in the twilight of the forest among the slender second growth like mossy tombstones commemorating man's wastefulness. Add to this forest land a quantity of lively mountain brooks, many old clearings with ruined houses and decaying orchards, and occasional rough farms with sunny hillside pastures, and you have an ideal place for birds, especially warblers, finches, and thrushes.

The most abundant bird in this locality, and the one which always seems to me typical of the old wood roads is the Slate-colored Junco. Here is his summer home, and along the "dug-ways" where the roads are cut into the hillsides, making steep fern covered and mossy banks, their nests are easily found. In one stretch of a half mile of road I have found as many as four, all in similar positions — under some root or fern clump in hollows dug into the little perpendicular banks. In the first week of July most of the nests contained 4 eggs each, but by the twelfth they were nearly all hatched and offered excellent subjects for photography. It was not necessary to hide the camera for in less than an hour the mother bird would become so accustomed to it that she would feed her young within 24 inches of the shining lens without apparent fear. The

darkness of the wood roads and the quick actions of the birds, however, made it hard to get good results without the best of lenses, so my efforts with an ordinary stock camera were not very satisfactory.

The other finches of the mountains were more conspicuous if less confiding, for the beautiful members of the family, such as the Indigo Bunting, Rose-breasted Grosbeak and Purple Finch, were abundant. At home in Massachusetts I have always thought of the Rose-breast as a comparatively uncommon and shy bird, but in these beech woods it was one of the commonest birds. Every morning and evening their liquid song was a delight, and throughout the day the males flashed from tree to tree eating the canker worms which had nearly defoliated parts of the forest.

Indigo Buntings frequented the clearings and old farm lands, nesting plentifully in the underbrush just where the stumpy fields merge into the deep woods. In one such place I found three of their nests within fifty yards of each other. At this season they seemed to be raising their second brood for one of the nests contained new laid eggs, while there were many young around just able to fly with ease.

While speaking of brilliant birds mention must be made of the Scarlet Tanagers which were even more abundant than the Grosbeaks in the worm infested patches of beech woods. In these bare trees their plumage showed off marvelously, and their throaty "chuck-who" and pleasing song might be heard at all hours of the day.

Flycatchers, too, were abundant; Kingbirds made the pastures lively with their quick sallies and noisy chatter; along the streams the Phœbes silently watched for insects; and from the swampy woods at noon came the drowsy call of the Wood Pewee or the incessant "chebec!" of the Least Flycatcher.

But the brightest charm of the Catskills for an ornithologist is in the number and variety of warblers. My first morning in the woods I saw eleven species, some of them the handsomest of the tribe. Among the few remaining hemlocks the Black and White, Myrtle, and Parula Warblers explored the lower branches, twittering and singing, while from the higher trees came the soft song of the Black-throated Green, or the insect-like call of the Black-

throated Blue, both very common. In the thickets along the streams or near the pastures, the Chestnut-sided Warblers nested, associated with the Redstarts and Maryland Yellow-throats. Where tall woods bordered the Beaverkill and the rocks were smooth from many freshets, the Blackburnian Warblers used to amuse us by trying to catch our flies as we fished for trout. They showed little fear and their flame colored throats were a constant pleasure.

Beside these abundant species there were two others of which I occasionally caught glimpses: the Mourning and Canadian Warblers. Both of these were rather shy and retiring, seldom singing, though I once heard the Canadian's song — a loud but sweet medley.

Yet when I have not mentioned the thrushes how can I give space to the many other birds which seem so typical of the Catskills? To the Winter Wren overflowing with song among the dark fallen hemlock trunks; the Black-billed Cuckoos gliding stealthily through the woods; the Chimney Swifts splashing onto the smooth surface of the lake at dusk; or the Red-tailed, and Red-shouldered Hawks drifting high over the mountains against the deep blue sky and sunny clouds.

And now the thrushes! During the day they seem like sedate quiet birds, flying shyly about the shady woods attending to their nests and young. The Wood Thrush is common on the high ground in tall open forest, and the Wilson Thrush or Veery is abundant in the fern floored swamps, while the Hermit prefers the vicinity of brooks and ponds, sometimes singing even at noon — softly, from some cool shade, as if he could not wait till evening.

But evening near Balsam Lake is the time for thrushes. As the shadows grow long and stretch down the mountain sides the thrushes begin to tune up, softly at first and at intervals, but as evening draws on the woods resound with most exquisite music, the true music of nature; not like the pleasant jingling songs of finches, or the soft trills of warblers, but strong, rich and mellow notes such as are heard from the sweetest of flutes. From the beech woods comes the slow chime-like song of the Wood Thrush, answered by others in different keys. In the swamps the Veeries join a rolling chorus, sending forth their liquid spirals of sound

in quick succession until the woods resound. And then the Hermits — from all sides their songs come, pure and bubbling, not slow and bell-like as the Wood Thrush nor fast and rolling like the Veery, but a perfect blending of bell tones and flute-like trills, soft or loud with the bird's varying mood. The dusk deepens, and the chorus increases till all the shadowy forest is echoing with deliciously clear music. Then, as darkness falls, they hush one by one; the sky fades over the western mountain; a Great Blue Heron flaps heavily up the lake and over the now silent forest, and far up the valley the "Whoo-hoo-hoo-ah!" of the Barred Owl floats down to us, mellowed by distance, telling that night has come.

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NOTES ON THE WINTER BIRDS OF SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS.

BY LUDLOW GRISCOM.

FROM December 15, 1917, to March 7, 1918, the writer was stationed at Camp Stanley, Leon Springs, Bexar Co., Texas. As much spare time as possible was devoted to observing birds, particularly week-ends of course, but incidental work was possible throughout the week. The life was an absolutely outdoor one in unsettled country. Field glasses were always a proper part of an officer's uniform, and perhaps I received much more credit for zeal in examining the country for tactical problems than I deserved!

The vicinity of Camp Stanley itself was very poor for birds, the barren rocky hillsides with but scant growth upon them, satisfying the requirements of a very limited number of species. The San Antonio River south of the city was a much better place. Several trips were made to the Medina Dam about twenty-five miles to the west. The dam has made a lake over ten miles long by one-half mile wide, where waterfowl were abundant. The hills here were covered with juniper and bayberry, and the bird-life as a result differed markedly.